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ABSTRACT

An assessment of the health education needs of children in Tennessee resulted in the initiation of a pediatric health fair by nursing students at Carson-Newman College. The fair was presented to approximately 180 second-grade students in a rural elementary school in East Tennessee. The following activities took place at the exhibits: (1) at the handwashing table, petre dishes were utilized to culture a washed hand, an unwashed hand, and a nickel; (2) children were presented with identical bottles, one containing a harmful substance, the other an edible substance to demonstrate the dangers of unlabeled medication; (3) nutrition was represented through a poster of the basic food groups and a Tic-Tac-Toe game based on good nutrition; (4) injuries and first aid were demonstrated on posters and students received band-aids; (5) a chart displayed proper toothbrushing and dental flossing, and children received toothpaste and colorful magnets; (6) children received blood pressure screening; (7) posters identified the needs of latch key children, and a paper for parents and children was distributed; and (8) the importance of exercise was demonstrated by students taking their resting pulse, performing jumping jacks, then retaking their pulse. The response to the health fair from the principal, teachers, elementary students and nursing students was positive. The principal indicated that the fair helped meet one of their educational goals and helped establish communication between the school and community. (KS)

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PEDIATRIC HEALTH FAIRS:

ONE APPROACH TO THE HEALTH NEEDS OF APPALACHIAN CHILDREN

by

Cynthia O. Huff

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Pediatric Health Fairs: One Approach to the Health Needs of Appalachian Children

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Abstract

An assessment of the health education needs of children in Tennessee resulted in the initiation of a pediatric health fair by nursing students at Carson-Newman College. Fair exhibits which reflect these needs included handwashing, drugs, nutrition, first aid, dental care, blood pressure screening, latch key children, and exercise. The fair was presented to approximately 180 second grade students in a rural elementary school in East Tennessee. It provided the opportunity for a combined approach to health education by the elementary school and a local college in the community.

Introduction

An assessment of the health education needs of children in Tennessee resulted in the initiation of an elementary school experience for nursing students at Carson-Newman College. An outgrowth of this experience included a pediatric health fair. Preparation for the fair encouraged the examination of normal growth, development and safety needs of children in the early childhood years.

A review of the literature revealed several facts. First, 9 percent of the sixth graders in Tennessee had reported alcohol use within the past thirty days. Second, 14.6 percent of Tennessee third grade students consumed junk food daily. Third, 64.1 percent of third grade students never floss their teeth. And finally, third, fourth, and fifth grade students left at home without adult supervision in Tennessee in 1990 was 17.4 percent.

Based on the above information and the needs of all children in this age group, nine exhibits were developed. The exhibits included handwashing, drugs, nutrition, first aid, dental care, blood pressure screening, latch key children, and exercise. The fair was presented to approximately 180 second grade students in a rural elementary school in east Tennessee.

Fair Exhibits

Nine exhibits were presented. The children began at the registration booth. Here they received a paper with their name and the name of each exhibit. As the children visited each exhibit, a sticker was placed beside the name of the exhibit.

The second table represented the need for handwashing. Petre dishes were utilized to culture a washed hand, an unwashed hand, and a nickel. The children were given a bag that contained soap and a crossword puzzle about handwashing. The bag was useful to hold the items they would receive at the other exhibits.

The third table concerned drugs. An example used to

demonstrate the danger of taking unlabeled medication involved presenting the children with two identical bottles. One contained Pine Sol and the second apple juice. The object was to guess which bottle contained which liquid by looking. The bottles could only be distinguished by smelling the open containers. Another example involved a bottle of red M&M's and iron tablets. There was also a empty can of beer and literature about alcohol and drug abuse written for elementary schoolers. This literature was obtained from a local mental health agency. A study of Tennessee third, fourth, and fifth graders by Obersaat found 2.5 percent of rural students and 1.1 percent of urban students had used alcohol.[1] A second statewide survey by the Tennessee Department of Health and Environment found 9 percent of sixth graders had reported alcohol use within the past thirty days.[2]

Nutrition was represented at the next table. Posters from the local dairy council demonstrated the basic four food groups. The children played a Tic Tac Toe game based on good nutrition. A correct answer about nutrition earned the student an X and an incorrect answer received an O. Obersaat found 14.6 percent of third grade students consumed junk food daily.[3]

The next table contained posters drawn to demonstrate different types of injuries and first aid. These included abrasions, first degree burns, and cuts. The children received band-aids at this table.

Dental care was displayed. This table had a chart about toothbrushing and dental flossing. The children received toothpaste and colorful magnets. Of Tennessee third grade students, 64.1 percent never floss their teeth.[4]

The next exhibit was a blood pressure screening. The Report of the Second Task Force On Blood Pressure Control in Children describes the need for early identification of hypertension in children.[5] The Report encourages yearly blood pressure measurement for children between the ages of three and adolescence. Of the 180 children screened, twelve were found to have a blood pressure reading that was higher than normal for this age group. A follow up blood pressure was done one week later and needed referrals were made at that time.

Posters were made to identify the needs of latch key children. Third, fourth, and fifth grade students left at home without adult supervision in Tennessee in 1990 was 17.4 percent.[6] A paper was developed for the parents to help them identify children able to be alone when necessary. The paper included suggestions for emergencies and "what to do if" questions for the children. The children were given the phone number of a local agency with a hotline for latch key children. It was explained that the persons at this number could answer questions about homework, what to do if you are scared, if there is an emergency, etc.

The last exhibit involved the importance of exercise. The children were taught how to take their carotid pulse for 30 seconds. It was explained that the heart was a muscle and that it must have regular exercise to be healthy and strong. The children took a resting pulse. They then performed ten jumping jacks and retook their pulse rate. This comparison helped to demonstrate the concept between exercise and the work of the heart.

Conclusion

The response to the health fair from the principal, teachers, elementary students, and nursing students was very positive. The principal of the school contributed the following thoughts on health education. Schools concerned about improving the health education of its children can contribute a great deal by allowing the organization and time necessary for this purpose. A unified approach to health education must include the participation of community groups to establish communication between the school and community. The elementary level is the critical time to educate the child regarding health issues. The pediatric health fair helped to meet one of the educational goals of the school which is to provide students with the opportunities to attain values and attitudes about good health.

An evaluation of the health fair by the nursing students revealed a favorable response. It was felt the health fair enhanced the clinical experience by encouraging the students to be more aware of the knowledge level and level of functioning of different pediatric clients. A second benefit was the opportunity to use primary intervention strategies which included health promotion and teaching. The nursing students also felt the children benefitted by being able to use all five senses in the learning experience.

The period of middle childhood is an excellent opportunity for health education. The child is able to understand explanations and has the motor skills necessary to undertake the majority of his/her self care needs. An assessment of the health needs for this age group demonstrates a continued need for intervention and cooperation between the school and community resources. A health fair for this age group provides an innovative and fun way for children to learn about health and turns into a very pleasant learning experience for all concerned.

Notes

[1]Obersaat, R. (1990). In-Class Microcomputer Health and Safety Assessment Among Tennessee Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Students. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.

[2]Tennessee Department of Health and Environment. (1989). 1989 Annual Report On Status Of Tennessee's Public School Students: Tennessee Public School Nurse Program.

[3]Obersaat

[4]Tennessee Department of Health and Environment

[5]National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (1987). Report Of The Second Task Force On Blood Pressure Control In Children--1987. Bethesda, MD.

[6]Tennessee Department of Health and Environment